

AFRICA RISING

THE BARBARA CHASE-RIBOUD
SCULPTURE IS CONCEIVED AS AN ARK
OF COLLECTIVE HISTORY, A VESSEL CREATED
FOR HUMAN REFLECTION WHICH PLOWS
AN OCEAN OF TIME AND SPACE.

AFRICA RISING IS A CULMINATION OF HER
COMMITMENT TO HISTORY, LITERATURE, POETRY, AND
SCULPTURE. IN THIS MONUMENT, ALL THE THREADS
OF HER CREATIVE LIFE ARE WOVEN INTO ONE
UNIQUE EXPRESSION, ITSELF EVOKING
THE INTRICATE AND DELICATE INTERWEAVING
OF THE COMMON HISTORY AND HERITAGE
OF ALL CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES.

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND
NEW YORK CITY

"More than 200 years had passed, when in May of 1991, the African Burial Ground was unearthed in New York City during the pre-construction phase for a federal office building. The recovery of this important cultural resource deeply impacted the descendant and broader community, bringing about a renewed awareness that has motivated dynamic discourse on cultural significance and historic preservation. Its rediscovery afforded a rare opportunity for reclaiming a neglected part of American history. The site was unique due to its prominence as a physical reminder of New York's early African community. At the time of rediscovery, it was recognized as the largest and only known urban pre-Revolutionary African cemetery in America.

The African Burial Ground is believed to have encompassed five to six acres of lower Manhattan. During the 1700's when the burial ground was mainly in use, Africans made up 14.4% to 20.9% of the population. Consistent with the marginal status of Africans in the colonial society, the burial ground was described as a desolate piece of unappropriated land and was located outside the city limits. According to city maps, by the late 1700's the oldest portions of the cemetery had already been covered over by development. As the city expanded, the existence of the African Burial Ground was eventually forgotten.

Through community activism and commitment, the African Burial Ground was awarded designations as both a "National Historic Landmark" and a "New York City Historic District".



COMMISSIONED FOR THE UNITED STATES BY THE
U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
TO MEMORIALIZE THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND
IN NEW YORK CITY

AFRICA RISING

by

Barbara Chase-Riboud

Out of Omega we came,
Out of the womb of the world we came
All pleasure in feast and love forgotten
All rancor in feud and war forgotten
All joy in birth and circumcision forgotten
We came, Blackbodies: the negative of the light
The only merchandise that carries itself
A column of jet quickening,
Gyrating in one celestial tribal dance
Spreading like a giant blastoma
Spinning itself into the fireball of a new planet.
In a season of stars, we came,
Out of Omega, rending the cosmos
Groaning across deserts and pyramids of Kush,
A lunar landscape of brimstone
Basalt and Obsidian, biotite and barium.
From undergrounds pebbled with diamonds and gold scum
We came, into the Hell of deathly White.
In eclipsed sun, the negation of time,
Conned and even bankrupt and ravished kingdom,
Zeila & Somaliland, Galla & Abyssinia, Tigre & Shoa
Niger & Nile, Orange & Congo, Cubango & Kasai
Strung out in caravans, we came, a stunned string of
Black pearls like a hundred year centipede: one thousand,
One thousand thousand, one million, three, six, nine, thirty million.
Torn from their roots, like belladonna lillies we came,
Death in every heart, sprawling over the badlands.
The red flag of slavery blotted out sky, hope and memory
Lashing the hot sand of Ogaden
Fingers clutching a chilled sun in cyclone
Granite phalli marking graves strewn backwards,





While murder moved...

The Gods sit mute and horrified on their

Polished haunches, while we labor

Through petrified forests, an armour of glinting sweat

Our mouths stuffed with pebbles

Our savage wail whirling soundless on

Bloodied lips beaten back at every step by clouds

Of insects that cling to flesh like leeches in love

Shackled hands and bent necks sway

In malignancy, oiled with tears

Their distant verse a children's chant in muffled

Barren dust that shifts and bursts underfoot

As light as charcoal, as deep as Genesis.

Outraged Spirits wheeze and groan, carried on slippery shoulders

Their godheads still roseate in the gathering dusk.

Magic is vanquished, no more will the Tribes prostrate themselves

Before Amon, Save, Seto & Whoot, Legba & Ogun.

No longer will the Nation swallow the burning sperm of warlocks

For they have allowed us and the Gods to fall into abomination.

The multi-colored powders of the Rites

Have blended into that which is all colors: Black

Boulders of our grief block our way like the

Palm of Shango and their weight undoes us all...

In the brazen glare of Africa's beach.

One collective scream rams the sullen sea

Vibrating the python of the continent

As tremors of our earthquake

Ripple back towards home and in that last moment,

With the sea and slavery before us,

The Race, resplendent unto itself dissolves and

All biographies become One.



Barbara Chase-Riboud author sculptor and poet was born in Philadelphia

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Centre Pompidou, Paris

Lannann Foundation, Los Angeles, California

Museum of Modern Art, New York

University Museum, Berkeley, California

Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey

Ministère de la Culture, Paris

Centre National des Arts Contemporains, Paris

Geigy Foundation, New York

Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia

Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library, New York

New York State Council on the Arts, New York State

St. John's University, New York

Harlem State Office Building, New York

Espace Cardin, Paris

New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans

Espace Kiron, Paris

LITERARY WORKS

FROM MEMPHIS & PEKING, 1974

SALLY HEMINGS, 1979

VALIDE, 1986

PORTRAIT OF A NUDE WOMAN AS CLEOPATRA, 1988

ECHO OF LIONS, 1989

THE PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER, 1995

EGYPT'S NIGHTS, 1996